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CANADA AND THE WAR

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*An Address to the American Federation of Labour  
1942 Convention*

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by

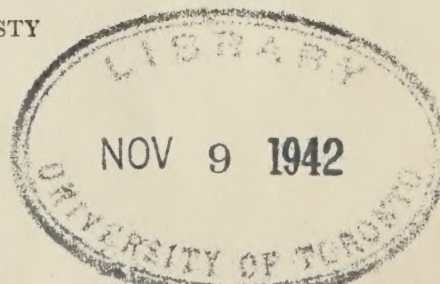
RIGHT HON. W. L. MACKENZIE KING, M.P.

*Prime Minister of Canada*

TORONTO, OCTOBER 9, 1942



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CANADA AND THE WAR

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## LABOUR AND THE WAR

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*An Address to the American Federation of Labour  
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RIGHT HON. W. L. MACKENZIE KING, M.P.  
*Prime Minister of Canada*

Toronto, October 9, 1942

It affords me much pleasure, both personally and on behalf of the Government of Canada, to add my voice to that of those who have already extended to you, Mr. President, to the officers and members of the American Federation of Labour, a warm welcome to our country.

I may perhaps be permitted to extend a word of special greeting to Mr. Green, in whom I also welcome a friend of many years standing.

We, in Canada, much regret the illness which has prevented Mr. Tom Moore from sharing in our welcome to the American Federation of Labour. The honourable place which organized Labour has come to hold in the minds of the Canadian people owes much to Mr. Moore's life long devotion to the cause of Labour, and to his many years of leadership of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

Delegates from the United States do not come to Canada as strangers. The unions federated in the American Federation of Labour are at once Canadian and American unions. The international organization of Labour on this continent is one of the outstanding examples of that unique relationship between Canada and the United States which is without parallel in the history of international relations.

### *Significance of the War to Labour*

I should like to speak to you today of the significance to Labour of the present war, and of the significance of Labour's part in the war.



This war, as I see it, is a conflict on a world scale between the forces which seek material gain and those which aim at human well-being. Neither of these opposing forces is new to us. What is new is the magnitude of the conflict and what it serves to disclose of the powers of good and evil.

We have before our very eyes a panorama of world dimensions, the significance of which none can mistake. The conflict is portrayed, not by some prophetic vision, as in the days of old, but in the stern realities of our own day.

It has been truly said that the angels of Light do not preside over certain nations and the angels of Darkness over others. In each and all they contend for victory. We do well, however, to remember that sooner or later, nations, no less than individuals, are forced to answer the question: Whom do ye serve, God or Mammon?

We are all agreed that we are fighting this war for freedom. I doubt, however, if we yet fully understand what freedom really is. Freedom, I would define as the absence of fear. As men's fears increase, so their freedom is lost. Man is only free to the extent that he has eliminated fear.

### *Destruction of Freedom by Fear*

The Nazis owe much of their success to an understanding of this fact. But by them fear has been used systematically as the instrument of domination.

It was by exploiting men's fears that Hitler and his gang seized control of Germany. With one class, they used the fear of Communism; with another class, the Nazi weapon was the fear of unemployment and want; still others were brought into subjection by fear of violence to themselves, or attacks upon their families.

Once in control in Germany, the Nazis used Fear to gain their ends in other countries. The fear of other classes and other races, the fear of social change, the fear of revolution, the fear of war—all these fears have been used by them to weaken the powers of resistance of other peoples. The war of nerves, in reality, is simply the exploiting of fears. Throughout this war, in the conquered countries, the use of fear has become a reign of terror.

When we see how systematically fear has been used to destroy freedom, we come to understand how great is the truth that freedom means the elimination of fear. As fear vanishes, freedom grows. This is as true of nations as of men. It has been true in all periods of history. It is true in all departments of life.

Today, our freedom, as nations and individuals, is menaced by the overpowering fear of Fascist domination. There is but one way to destroy that fear. It is to destroy the powers which are striving to dominate and enslave all peoples on all continents.



### *The Fears to be Overcome*

The overthrow of despotism based upon the military might of Germany and Japan is only part of the vast undertaking which the free nations of the world have still before them if true Freedom is to be attained. Until the enemy is defeated, we must bend all our energies to the elimination of the one great fear of world domination and world slavery. But this is merely a clearing of the ground on which the structure of a new order will rest.

Next to the fear of war, the greatest fear today, to most men, is the fear of unemployment. It is one of the bitter ironies of our time that full employment has been achieved only as a result of war. Men everywhere are asking the question: Why, if there is no lack of work in wartime, is work not to be had at a time when men, instead of devoting themselves to the work of destruction, might enjoy the fruits of their labour?

I believe the war is teaching us that the obstacles to full employment were not real obstacles; that a partnership of management, of workers and of the community can make useful work available, in time of peace no less than in time of war, for all who need or want to work.

When the war is won, there will be an immense task to repair the great physical destruction caused by war; there will be a pent-up demand for all the goods and services which are increasingly denied in war-time; there will be the huge task of providing food for the starving peoples of the old world. These tasks alone will provide work for millions of men and women for many years.

But the work of repairing and restoring the ravages of war will not be enough. Fortunately, we are also learning that the only limit to our productive capacity is the limit of our resources, and our will and skill to use them to satisfy human need instead of human greed.

### *The Conservation of Human Resources*

Before the war, we talked about the conservation of natural resources. Unhappily, we heard much less about the conservation of human resources—the lives and health and happiness of men and women and children. Today, our aim is total mobilization of resources and of manpower for the waging of total war. When the war is over, we must seek, above all else, to use our natural and material resources to conserve human resources—to promote the health and happiness of all the people. Our resources of land, of sea, of forest, and of mine, were given to man by the Creator for the preservation, and not for the destruction of life. The people of no country can be made happy, contented and prosperous except by safeguarding the lives and welfare of the many, and by protecting from injustice and misfortune the homes of the humble in the land.



The fear of unemployment which arises where, despite a willingness to work, work is not to be had, is only one of many fears which arise out of a sense of insecurity to haunt the minds of the workers. These fears arise where, through inadequate compensation, sickness, invalidity or accident, the capacity to earn is gradually, if not wholly, lost. Fears arise where extra outlays to meet the most immediate of family needs result in extra privation. Fear is ever present at the mere thought of age being confronted with the alternative of poverty or dependence. Until these fears have been eliminated, the war for freedom will not be won.

### *The Basis of the New Order*

A new world order will come into being only as the legitimate fears of mankind are removed. The old order has been based on fear, resulting in conflict alike in industrial and in international relations. The new order must be based on faith, leading to co-operation between the parties in industry and to co-operation among the nations of the world. The new order must be based on human rights; not on the rights of property, privilege, or position. The new order must be a world order. It must be governed by a universal rule of law. To bring the new order into being, we shall need a spiritual, not a material interpretation of life. In estimating human values, the new order will be concerned with men's character and personality, not with their power and position, nor with the extent of their possessions. The souls of men will be more precious than their bodies.

The era of freedom will be achieved only as social security and human welfare become the main concern of men and nations.

It is necessary that social security and human welfare should be expressed in definite terms. It is, however, not my purpose to attempt to give a blue-print of the new order. Of the kind of objectives I have in mind, I would merely mention the following as a national minimum: useful employment for all who are willing to work; standards of nutrition and housing, adequate to ensure the health of the whole population; social insurance against privation resulting from unemployment, from accident, from the death of the breadwinner, from ill health, and from old age.

### *The Rights of the Community*

In war, the preservation of the existence of the community is placed before the interests of individuals or groups. Here, too, is a lesson for meeting the problems of peace.



By placing the interests of the community before the interests of individuals or groups; by social control, in which government, labour and management all share, human well-being can be vastly increased.

Monopoly of control must give way to joint control in all that pertains to industrial relations. I should like to see labour-management committees in every industry in our country. I should like to see production committees in every branch of agricultural effort. Happily the principle of the partnership of management, of workers and the community is making steady progress. Where it is tried, it is proving its worth. It is only by fully realizing and accepting this partnership that the necessities of industry can be harmonized with the hopes of humanity.

The war has shown us that the way of monopoly, of unrestricted power, is a way that leads to destruction, desolation and death. The only path of prosperity and of peace is, I believe, the path of equality, of co-operation, and of human brotherhood.

That is the victory for which alike in international and industrial relations we must fight and work. Nothing less can give us the will to accept the hardships, to make the efforts and to bear the burdens which are ours to-day at the crossroads of humanity. No lesser hope will suffice to sustain our march on the highway to a better future.

I do not need to remind you of what free men have to lose in a Nazi victory. I do not need to tell an audience of workers how the Nazis, in their own country and in the lands they have conquered, regard the rights of Labour. We all know something of what has happened to the workers in Poland, in Norway, in the Low Countries, in France, and in Central and Southern Europe.

### *No Compromise with Evil Forces*

None of us would willingly do anything to contribute to a Nazi victory. There is, however, a subtle danger that such might be the effect of Nazi propaganda. We begin to hear it said that the war must end in a stalemate—in some kind of compromise. This is a dangerous suggestion for the very reason that it exploits many of our deepest fears:—the fear of the hardships, burdens and sacrifices of war; the fear of the bloodshed and horrors of war, the fear of the loss of our loved ones. It is the old idea that we are not our brothers' keepers; that what happens in other continents need not be our concern. It hints at a compromise between slavery in the old world and freedom in the new.

Those of you who are Americans have but to turn back the pages of your own history to know that such a compromise cannot endure. Compromise nearly destroyed the American union. To attempt such a compromise to-day would, in the end, be no less fatal to the future of the world.



Consider what it would mean. At best, it would be an armistice. Both sides would have to be prepared for a renewal of the struggle. This continent would remain an armed camp. All the burdens, all the restrictions which are accepted as a temporary necessity, would become a permanent feature of our lives. The greater part of our energies, our wealth and our resources would have to be devoted to the building up of armaments. By bitter competition, our standards of living and human well-being would gradually be dragged down to the levels which Germany and Japan are imposing on Europe and Asia.

Without the hope of a better future which now sustains us, the burden would become unbearable. In the end, it would lead to internal dissension which would play into the hands of the totalitarian conquerors, or it would lead to repression on this continent little better than domination from abroad. There can be no compromise with the evil forces of domination. The world cannot endure half-slave and half-free.

### *Axis New Order Based on Inequality*

Hitler boasts of his new order. What is the foundation on which the Nazi order is to be established? Essentially, it has one basis, and one basis only: not equality, but inequality among men. In the Nazi system, the Germans are a master race, all other peoples are inferior to them. The mass of men are fit only to be slaves or are considered mere brutes. Hitler goes so far as to deny the very humanity of the coloured races.

In the Nazi system, even the so-called master race itself is not a band of equals. It is divided sharply between leaders and led; between the glorified party and the despised masses. For the leaders, all privileges are reserved:—power, position, material advantage. The mass of men exist only to serve their masters, and to fight and die in order to impose the will of their masters on the whole world.

Nor let it be forgotten that the “co-prosperity sphere” of Japan is essentially the same thing. The Japanese are unsurpassed in the art of imitation. What are these totalitarian systems that Germany and Japan would fasten upon the world? They are but the old order in its worst aspects; an order no longer restricted and gradually vanishing, but one to be made permanent and world-wide.

Any new order worthy of the name must place the emphasis on equality among men. The hope of the future is the universal recognition of our common humanity.

### *Significance of Labour in the War*

In speaking of the significance of Labour in the war, you, who represent so vast a number of the workers of this continent, would, I know, be the first to protest were I to fail to pay to your comrades



in the fighting forces their due and fitting tribute. Whatever burdens and hardships may fall to your lot, or to mine, we all know that nothing can compare with the readiness to sacrifice life itself which the soldiers, sailors, airmen and merchant seamen accept as the condition of their service.

But the men in the fighting forces—the vast majority drawn from the ranks of workers—would wish me to pay every possible tribute to the men and women, without whose daily toil, their own service would be of no avail. They, above all others, are looking to-day to the men and women on the farms and in the fisheries who keep them fed; to the men in forest and mine whose daily toil is the foundation of industry; to the men and women in factory and workshop who fashion their weapons and make their munitions; to the men and women in transport and in all the services of supply of a modern nation at war. In a word, the toil and skill and devotion of a vast industrial army are essential to keep the troops in the field, the ships on the sea, and the planes in the air, on all the fronts of a world-encircling struggle. Side by side with our fighters, it is to the workers that we must look if the enemy is to be destroyed and if freedom is to prevail.

### *The Unknown Warrior and the Unknown Worker*

The key to victory is a partnership unbroken and unbreakable of the warrior and the worker. The warrior cannot fight without weapons, munitions, supplies and food produced by the worker. The worker of today cannot escape a return to serfdom save by the might of the armed forces. The freedom of the world depends upon the combined efforts of the fighting brotherhood of warriors and the producing brotherhood of workers.

At the close of the last great war, the unknown soldier became the symbol of humanity's struggle for freedom. To my mind, that symbol told but half the story. In the symbolism of the unheralded forces that are contributing so largely to victory in the present war, the hand of the unknown fighter will clasp the hand of the unknown worker. Together they will stand—the symbol of those who have fought and worked to save their fellowmen.

But symbols are not enough. They merely proclaim to the world a meaning it should take to heart. I wonder if today we fully appreciate the part the unknown soldier is playing in this war? I am perfectly certain we have not begun to comprehend the heroic service of the unknown worker, not alone at a time of war, "with a world on-looking", but at all times—from day to day, from year to year, from the dawn of manhood to the close of life.

The unknown soldier has been honoured in death because, though his identity was lost in the vastness of the numbers to which he



belonged, his service and sacrifice were recognized as a main factor in the winning of the war. Most meritorious of all, to my mind, is the fact that service and sacrifice alike were accepted by him without thought of glory, but just as a part of his human lot. I doubt if all the codes and courts of chivalry have given to the world anything so noble, so heroic, as these brotherhoods of the unknown who fight and who toil without thought of personal aggrandisement, moved only by a something in their hearts which causes them to look forward to a better day.

### *A Vision of the Truly Heroic*

You will find in the writings of William James an understanding and a vision of the truly heroic, which may help to sustain you all, and all of those whom you represent, in the mighty task which is yours in these days of war. His words, moreover, help to unite, in a true perspective, the sacrifices of the soldiers in the field and the patient service of all who toil. Let me give you Professor James' message in his own words:

"Not in clanging fights and desperate marches only is heroism to be looked for, but on every railway bridge and fireproof building that is going up today. On freight trains, on the decks of vessels, in cattle yards and mines, on lumber rafts, among the firemen and the policemen, the demand for courage is incessant; and the supply never fails. There, every day of the year somewhere, is human nature in extremis for you. And wherever a scythe, an axe, a pick, or a shovel is wielded, you have it sweating and aching and with its powers of patient endurance racked to the utmost under the length of hours of the strain.

"As I awoke to all this unidealized heroic life around me, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes; and a wave of sympathy greater than anything I had ever before felt with the common life of common men began to fill my soul. It began to seem as if virtue with horny hands and dirty skin were the only virtue genuine and vital enough to take account of. Every other virtue poses; none is absolutely unconscious and simple, and unexpectant of decoration or recognition, like this. . . .

"In God's eyes the differences of social position, of intellect, of culture, of cleanliness, of dress, which different men exhibit, . . . must be so small as practically quite to vanish. . . . The exercise of the courage, patience, and kindness, must be the significant portion of the whole business; . . . At this rate, the deepest human life is everywhere, is eternal. And, if any human attributes exist only in particular individuals, they must belong to the mere trapping and decoration of the surface-show.



“ Thus are men’s lives levelled up as well as levelled down,—levelled up in their common inner meaning, levelled down in their outer gloriousness and show.”

*The Inner Meaning of the Struggle*

Do we not find in these words of William James the inner meaning of the struggle through which men and nations are passing to-day? Will this war not determine whether we are to go on, in the future, as we have too largely in the past, ever seeking to emphasize the differences between nations and between individuals, or whether “men’s lives are to be levelled up as well as levelled down—levelled up in their common inner meaning, levelled down in their outer gloriousness and show!”



